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From Text to Life: The New Testament and What We Do With It
NT/HOM6/750
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Purpose: In the last century of theological scholarship, we have seen a remarkable revival of *theological* approaches to biblical scholarship. Yet there still remains the great challenge of bringing the treasures of this new scholarship into our life together in the church. How do we “bridge” or “translate” (the metaphors are all unsatisfying) academic biblical scholarship for the ministerial tasks of preaching and leading and serving a congregation? This course will practice engaging with biblical scholarship and making its findings accessible in the life of the church. The biblical texts are efforts to make sense of God’s election of Israel and incarnation in Christ. They are our best teachers for how to speak well of God among our people.

For the sake of the course we will focus on St. Paul and the Pauline corpus of the NT. The course will feature seminar discussion, sermon-preaching, academic engagement, in-class visits from and field trips to local ministries that live out the NT in illuminating ways.

Prerequisites: HOM 500 for ministerial students and NT501 for all. I try not to be legalistic about things like prereqs, so please see me if we need to discuss an exception, but I am assuming introductory knowledge and competence in preaching and New Testament.

Manners We will conduct class without screens, insofar as this is possible. That is, we will take notes by hand, we will not check smartphone messages unless in an emergency. If you have no timekeeping device other than your phone (like me) please place the device on airplane mode. This policy is flexible if you have a medical or other reason why you can only take notes on a laptop. I just find that with screens out I’m too tempted to do other things online. The course only works if we’re listening deeply to God and to one another, and screens interrupt that listening.

Competence Objectives

1-To read, wrestle with, digest, and open up for others a complex work in NT studies. The ability to take on an intimidating intellect and a big book in biblical studies is a key skill in graduate school. Students will unpack the books’ arguments for the rest of the class’s benefit and also to write about them for an audience other than the author’s intended (a more popular readership, a listening congregation, etc). This is the set of skills one would

need to review a work of scholarship for an academic or popular journal, or to engage sophisticated scholarship on the way to producing one's own.

2-To engage with one another about the import of scholars' work not just in the guild but for the sake of the wider church. Course discussion will be the heart of our class. Students will need to show an ability to apprehend the depth of an author's argument, why it matters, and what it would mean for the sake of the church if that argument were taken seriously in the church's life together. These are the skills necessary to preach in a way that's informed by scholarship or to build a curriculum for teaching in an academic, parish, or other popular context.

3-To offer and receive hospitality well. We will have numerous chances to host a visiting scholar, to visit a place of vibrant living out of the NT, and to engage folks' work, both popular and academic. This is harder than it seems! It's also high on the list of traits of leaders in the scriptures. When we have class guests, students will need to have shown they have researched those guests, they can ask good questions, they can receive more than the guests' talking points but also invite the guest to think out loud in a way that integrates material from the rest of the course.

4-To integrate and create from the course's material. Research students will write a final paper that will show the learning they have done this semester; ministerial students will preach sermons that show the learning they have done during the semester. The trick, as with every capstone assignment, is to show the instructor you have integrated what you have read and discussed without showing it off ('look at all that I read!'). The paper needs to read naturally for a fellow NT scholar; the sermons to be intelligible for anyone who turns up for church that day.

Format and Content

This is a semester-long course worth 3.0 credit hours, for which we will meet weekly on Tuesdays from 2-5. Work in the course consists of classes including lectures, discussions, and small group exercises.

There are two loose "tracks" in the course: one for research students or those planning to pursue academic work and a second for ministerial students or those planning to lead in the church or world. All students will take turns leading class discussion as many times as necessary (based on enrollment) over the course of the semester. All are responsible for participating in class discussion when their colleagues are leading.

The course will have several sources of learning. The primary teachers of the course are the writers of scripture themselves: Paul and the deuteron-Pauline writers. The secondary teachers are the scholarly interpreters and one another as we interpret, argue about, push back against, and celebrate those authors. How do they bridge the 1st century material and the communities for which they write? How do we mine their insights for our own ministries? Thirdly we will learn from practitioners whose "writing" is not so much on paper as it is in the flesh and blood of a community's life together. How do Grandview Calvary Church, or A Rocha, or a parish trying to renew itself, or other ministries of

worship or mercy live out the NT? How should life together in our places of ministry look if we're to do the same? In this syllabus "ministerial students" refers to those in VST's basic degrees: MDiv / MA PPL / MA IIS. "Research students" refers to those pursuing MATS or ThM degrees.

Students will be evaluated in several ways. First and most important, they must show they have read and can engage with the course material. Students must show they can "translate" or "bridge" academic material for an audience other than its intended. In some cases, the author has already done some of that work: N.T. Wright often writes for more popular or lay audiences than his primary one of fellow academic interpreters; Robinson is already interpreting for congregational renewal. In other cases the translation work is more akin to breaking fresh ground, as with Barclay.

Research students will write a final paper engaging one or more of the NT interpreters. This can take the form of a critical review of that researcher (say, for an extended book review in an academic journal), a translation or bridging of that author's work for an audience unpracticed in reading at that level (as for a popular publication or a curriculum for teaching in the parish), or a third option arrived at in consultation with the instructor.

Ministerial students will write and preach two sermons drawing on the week's scholarship for the sake of a congregation's life together. This is especially difficult—to show evidence of serious engagement (without showing off that one has done the homework!), and writing in a way that's accessible to anyone who stumbles into church that day. Think of it as explaining NT Wright to your grandmother. Or better, of interpreting Paul with Wright's help to preach in a way that builds up Christ's church.

And all students must show they are thinking about putting flesh on the bone of the scriptures, as our guests do in their lives and ministries. The question is not just "What did Paul say?" or "What does Gorman say about what Paul says?" but "How should we live now in light of Paul's witness?"

Texts:

- John Barclay *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).
- Tim Dickau *Plunging into the Kingdom Way: Practicing the Shared Strokes of Community, Hospitality, Justice, and Confession* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2011).
- Darrell Guder, *Called to Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).
- Sylvia Keesmat & Brian Walsh *Colossians Remixed* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2004).
- Leah Kostamo *Planted: A Story of Creation, Calling, and Community* (Wipf & Stock 2013).
- Anthony B. Robinson *Called to Lead: Paul's Letters to Timothy for a New Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).
- N.T. Wright *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

These will be available at the UBC bookstore; of course you can purchase at Amazon as well.

Reserves:

- John Barclay “Paul, the Gift, and the Battle Over Gentile Circumcision: Revisiting the Logic of Galatians,” *Australian Biblical Review* Vol 58 (2010), 36-56.
- Jason Byassee “Surprised by Wright,” a cover story profile of N.T. Wright for *Christianity Today* (April 2014), 36-43.
- Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1996), 16-72.
- Wesley Hill “Grace Redefined,” in *Books & Culture* (Jan-Feb 2016):
<http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2016/janfeb/grace-redefined.html>.
- Scot McKnight “The Unexamined Grace,” in *Books & Culture* (Jan-Feb 2016),
<http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2016/janfeb/unexamined-grace.html>
- J. Ross Wagner, “*Mission Dei*: Envisioning an Apostolic Reading of Scripture,” in *Missiology: An International Review* Vol XXXVII, No. 1 (January 2009), 19-32.

COURSE POLICIES

1. **Attendance** For a weekly course, VST requires at least 80% attendance. ***This means attending class on time with no more than 2 allowable absences for any reason.***
2. **Reading and assignments** Students are expected to read all required assignments before class and to complete all assignments as outlined in the syllabus within the specified dates of the course and term.
3. **Academic honesty** Students are expected to adhere to VST’s requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
4. **Inclusive language** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
5. **Assignments and Course Evaluation**
 - Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is “Not Approved”) including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.
 - Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write. For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.
6. **Late assignments**
Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course. If two or more assignments for the course are submitted late, the final grade will be reduced by one mark (a B+ becomes a B) with further reductions possible for very late assignments.”)
7. VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment. If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in

this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

Calendar

9/13 Introduction: for the first half of the class we'll go over the syllabus, I'll present my course expectations, and we'll assign seminar leaders for each week. Second half of class we will welcome **Darrell Guder**. We'll all have read chapters 3, 6 & 7 of *Called to Witness* and Ross Wagner's essay on Moodle (I know prereading for a course is unusual—it will be reckoned to you as righteousness).

9/20 First half of Wright's *Paul in Fresh Perspective* and Byassee

9/27 We will meet at **A Rocha** (1620 192 St., Surrey BC—please see me with any travel difficulties). We will visit with **Leah Kostamo**, co-founder of A Rocha and author of *Planted*. Please read the book (75 pp for ministerial students; 125 pp for research students; entirety for the student leading the seminar). We will also read in advance Colossians 1, Romans 8, and Revelation 21. Please plan to ask her how her community embodies the biblical witness to creation care.

10/4 Second half of Wright's *Paul in Fresh Perspective*

10/11 First third of Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* and Barclay's essay on Moodle.

10/18 **Meet at Grandview Calvary Baptist Church** (1803 E. 1st Ave, Vancouver). Tim Dickau will lead the seminar on site about his church's ministry, which he describes as a combination of NT Wright's biblical scholarship, John Perkins' Christian Community Development, Anabaptists' politics, and Catholic spiritual practice. Read Dickau's *Plunging Into the Kingdom Way* in advance (ministerial students: any 75 pages of your choosing will do; research students pick your 125 pp.).

10/25 reading week no class

11/1 Second third of Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* and Hill and McKnight

11/8 Third third of Barclay's *Paul and the Gift*

11/15 First half of Walsh & Keesmat

11/22 Second half of Walsh & Keesmat

11/29 **Guest: Tony Robinson**. Please read from his *Called to Lead* (75 pp for ministerial students, 125 for research students, entirety for the student who will present this day). Tony is a gifted pastor and leadership consultant, now retired, traveling up from Seattle for this three-hour session with you. Please host him well—by which I mean push him around! Demand answers from him about how to lead in light of the Pauline witness.

12/6 Hays, concluding conversation

Expectations, Assignments, and Evaluative Criteria

1. Class participation: Students are expected to participate in class discussions. Evaluative criteria: comments and questions show adequate preparation, an understanding of the assigned readings and exercises, and a readiness to apply readings to interpretive questions and insights.
2. In-class presentation(s): Depending on enrollment, students will take one or more turns leading the seminar. This will mean reading the material for that day especially closely and kicking off the class with a 2-page single space paper (around 1000 words) engaging the reading material, asking questions of it, and inspiring conversation to last the rest of the seminar. We will assign weeks for you to lead seminar on the first day we meet.
3. Ministerial students: You will preach two sermons integrating the material in the class for your ministry location. The first sermon is due **November 1**, the second **December 16**. Please film these (high tech is not necessary—your phone is fine) and get them to me so that I can watch and evaluate. Please also turn in a manuscript, though you don't necessarily have to preach from a manuscript. The trick will be to show me as professor that you've read the course material and digested it without having to broadcast that to your hearers ("as John Barclay says . . .").
4. Research students will turn in to me an extended essay evaluating one or more of the NT scholars whose work we've read in class. My essay and those by Ross Wagner, Wes Hill, and Scot McKnight are exemplars. This is the sort of paper you could submit that gives an overview of a scholar's work and evaluates its quality for sake of the church and/or academy. I'm imagining 3000 words, but the length is negotiable vis a vis the venue you have in mind. **Due December 16**.
5. Audit students are required to do all the reading and participate in the class discussions and exercises.
6. Certificate students are required to do all the reading, participate in the class discussions.

Bibliography

Nicholas Lash *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM 1986).

N.T. Wright *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* 2 vols (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).